Paired reading at St John’s Primary School

Insights into the paired reading project at St John’s Primary in South Ayrshire

Age 3-16
CFE Levels Early to Senior
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St. John’s Primary School ran a paired reading project in 2017 and used the project as a starting point to create a reading culture in their school. Teacher Clare Casey tells us how they got on . . .

Getting started

The class started the shared reading project by getting to know their Primary 1 buddies. The Primary 6s took them for lunch and visited them in the infant playground, letting them know about the project and when it was all going to happen. The Primary 1s were so excited to be included in such a great opportunity and it was a joy to watch the children meeting and chatting in the lunch hall.

We started preparing for our shared reading sessions in September and we had a countdown of days until Book Week Scotland in November, when the sessions would take place. The children would take turns to change the countdown raising anticipation.

Exploring the books

We registered for the Bookbug Picture Book Prize and were gifted a pack of the three shortlisted books: *Little Owl’s Egg*, *The Fourth Bonniest Baby in Dundee* and *Gorilla Loves Vanilla*. The reactions to the books were fantastic from the Primary 6s. They discussed their favourites and predicted which book their buddy would prefer.

In the lead-up to Book Week Scotland we created lots of different reading activities for the children, including suggested activities from the Scottish Book Trust website which went down a storm! These activities developed their questioning, prediction skills and the tone, clarity and expression in their voice when they read.

The P6s particularly enjoyed reading picture books again. Since adding picture books to our reading time in class, the children not only enjoy reading more, the books help with punctuation, grammar and reading aloud.

Creating a reading culture

The project allowed us to nurture a reading culture not just in our class but throughout the school, including children from all stages. Leading up to the sessions, P6 took part in lots of reading activities, including The First Minister’s Reading Challenge, Discover Reading at our local library and Scottish Book Trust Authors Live. We looked at a variety of books including fact, fiction and online books.

We designed ‘We are reading…’ signs for each classroom to hang outside their rooms, allowing children to see what each class was reading. We set interesting and fun challenges every week and saw some children reading books in unusual places.
Steven was reading whilst keeping fit, Eddie was reading on the bus and Sophie was reading at gymnastics class! Our reading challenge this week is to read to a younger sibling or cousin at home.

Our library pupil voice group became involved as well and ran a competition during Book Week Scotland to guess the number of books in the library. We were able to buy some new books for our school library with the money raised. The children also designed personalised bookmarks for the school library for other pupils to use. This encouraged the children to spend more time in the library during class and break time.

In the run up to the sessions and during Book Week Scotland, there was a buzz about the whole school community. Everyone was involved in some way and the janitor even came down to watch one of the shared reading sessions. P6 are now in high demand (which they love!) and are in the process of organising a shared reading session with the P3s too. The project was a great success in our school and we look forward to participating again next year (although, I think we will have to include the new P7s in the project next year as I don’t think they are happy to let it go)!

**Impact on pupils and staff**

The project encouraged less able readers to read aloud, building their confidence. They were able to read to peers a lot easier and enjoyed reading to their P1 buddies. Tamzin in P6 said, “I didn’t like reading in front of my friends in class because they are better than me but I loved reading during role play when they would pretend to be a P1. I felt good reading to my buddy too because I was teaching them new words.”

The project has developed enjoyment of reading. Sometimes, the children pick the reading corner during reward time over games and technology, which used to be the first choice activities.

The Primary 1 pupils and teachers were very enthusiastic about the project too. It allowed them to form relationships around the school and work in new learning environments. The project has raised their confidence and self-esteem. The primary 1 teachers also feel that it has had a positive impact on the literacy skills on the P1 pupils and expect to see this in the end of session PIPS (Performance Indicators in Primary Schools) scores.

We continue to set up regular shared reading sessions with our picture book library. This is always great fun and all classes look forward to the sessions.